

Confronting the sacred

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# **Confronting the *Sacred***

**Durkheim vindicated**

**through philosophical analysis, ethnography,  
archaeology, long-range linguistics, and  
comparative mythology**

**by Wim van Binsbergen**



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COVER ILLUSTRATIONS: *front*: Constituting symbols of the divine throughout Eurasia and Northern Africa, wind-swept strings of flags meet the pious visitor at the shrine of Buduruwagala, Southern Sri Lanka, where colossal statues of Buddha and his most senior companions have been hewn into the living rock (photo Wim van Binsbergen, 2011); *back*: the author overlooking the temple complex of the Late Iron Age site of Siracusa, Sicily, Italy, October 2017 (photo Patricia Saegerman); *spine*: an Australian Aboriginal notable, South Australia, photographed by Captain Sweet, probably in the Murray River area near the New South Wales border c. 1870, courtesy <http://www.oceania-ethnographica.com/aust6.html>, with thanks

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*‘...Together let us beat this ample field.  
Try what the open, what the covert yield ;  
The latent tracts, the giddy heights, explore  
Of all who blindly creep, or sightless soar ;  
Eye nature's walks, shoot folly as it flies,  
And catch the manners living as they rise :  
Laugh where we must, be candid where we can;  
But vindicate the ways of God to man.*

Pope, *Essay on Man*, Epistle I, 9-16

*This book's publication marks (somewhat belatedly) the centennial of Émile Durkheim's death in 1917. Confronting the Sacred is dedicated to his memory.*

# Preliminaries

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